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MEANING OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

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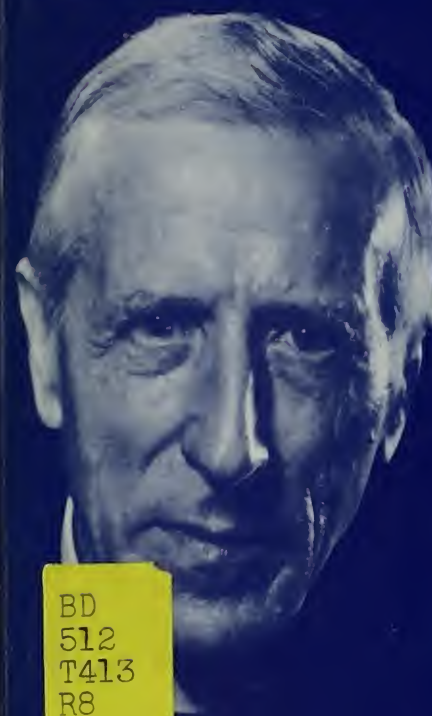
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Meaning of Teilhard de
The Phenomenon of Man Chardin

The Phenomenon of Man

By François Russo, S. J.

CONSIDERABLE attention has been given recently to a book translated from French into English and entitled *The Phenomenon of Man* (Harper, 1959). It is the most important of the works that came from the pen of a man who was both a member of a religious order and a well-known scientist.

Born in France in 1881, in the Province of Auvergne, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin entered the Society of Jesus in 1899 after completing his secondary education at the Jesuit College of Mongré, near Lyons. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1911. From that time on, he dedicated himself to the so-called earth sciences, and above all to paleontology. His scientific work made it necessary for him to spend long years in China, and to travel widely. He returned to Paris in 1946, and then in 1951 went to New York, where he died suddenly on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955.

Fr. Teilhard was a member of the French

FR. Russo, one of the editors of the French Jesuit review, *Les Etudes*, is uniquely qualified by his theological and scientific training, as well as by personal knowledge of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to write this authoritative appraisal of that much discussed book, *The Phenomenon of Man*.

Academy of Sciences. During his later years, in the United States, he was attached to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

The author of *The Phenomenon of Man* was a scientist of international repute, to whom are owed several extremely important contributions in the field of human paleontology. Moreover, Fr. Teilhard was a man haunted by the apostolic needs of his time. All through his life he struggled to understand the human and religious meaning that lies behind the advance of the sciences and particularly of biology.

Over and above his directly scientific works, he is to be credited with numerous writings of a general character that treat large philosophical and religious problems, especially insofar as they touch upon the sciences. *The Phenomenon of Man* is but the first volume of these works; four other volumes have already been published in France (Le Seuil, Paris).

These writings of Fr. Teilhard often seem like sketches, or the presentation of a piece of research as it might be proposed to intimate friends, rather than the expression of his fully elaborated thought meant for the larger public. But *The Phenomenon of Man* is one work that Fr. Teilhard most explicitly wanted to see published. In its pages he brought to-

gether the essential and guiding ideas of a world-view which he kept progressively sharpening and reformulating all during his life, and whose basic insights date from 1916. This book, which was finished in 1947, was published only in 1955, a few months after his death.

TWO LEVELS

One can distinguish in *The Phenomenon of Man* two levels of its author's considerations: on one hand, a *description* of the evolution of the world, where certain elements of hypothesis are already present; on the other, an attempt at an *explanation* of this evolutionary process.

For Fr. Teilhard the evolution of the world is viewed in four stages: pre-life (*la prévie*), life, thought, and hyper-life or a stage beyond life (*la survie*).

During the period of pre-life, matter passes from an undifferentiated state to that of organized forms which represent, first of all, the elements, and then bodies composed of a more and more complex structure. All this while, the universe in its totality is setting in motion a process of expansion which it will continue to pursue all through its history.

The appearance of life represents a passage through some sort of threshold. From this point on there begins a continuing develop-

ment of living forms that mount up into more and more organized species—a process ending in animal forms very close to that of man. Life has certain well-determined “manners,” and its qualitative progression is clearly measured by means of what Fr. Teilhard calls a “parameter of cephalization.” This means that the farther we advance in evolution, the more the complexity of the brain increases, at least for certain phyla. Among these phyla, there is one of “pure and direct cerebralization,” which leads to man.

We find here, traced by the hand of a master, an admirable tableau of the story of life. These precise and stirring pages constitute, beyond all doubt, that part of Père Teilhard’s work which is the most scientific in nature and also the least debatable.

After the appearance of life, the emergence of man constitutes a new and critical transformation. It is “the momentary pause of reflection.” It is an extremely important moment in the history of life, and we shall perhaps never succeed in elucidating the phenomenology of its process with total clarity. The author writes: “At that point earth is reborn, or better, it finds its soul.”

This part of the book contains a masterly treatment of the paleontological problem of the origins of man—an exposé that requires only a few retouchings here and there in order

to be brought up to date with discoveries that have taken place since it was written. These stirring analyses truly make us understand that “man is the ascending arrow of the great biological synthesis.”

In a final stage, we confront the prolongation of evolution in the development of humanity. This development is presented essentially as a phenomenon of *convergence*. By this is meant a “coming together” of humanity—a process which in no way tends to form an impersonal all, but rather effects a union that allows for differentiation and distinction within an ever more narrow solidarity and through a ceaseless interpenetration—the end-product of consciousness being constantly enlarged and augmented.

PRINCIPLE OF EVOLUTION

Thus we see that the synthesis that Fr. Teilhard presents to us has evolution as its basic principle of explanation. Recognized at first in the realm of living forms, evolution is extended to the whole ensemble of the universe. There was already an evolutionary process at work before the appearance of life, and then, after the emergence of man, evolution goes on following its course from the very start in man’s biological form. Finally, evolution is more and more evident during the progress of humanity.

Each of these great stages of evolution, of course, has its own proper character, but the same fundamental dynamism runs through and sustains them all. Thus, what is to be has already been "fore-announced" by that which is and by that which has been. The evolution of matter somehow prefigures life. In fact, this is precisely why Fr. Teilhard calls it pre-life.

AN ULTIMATE CONVERGENCE

To speak in general, "nothing could one day emerge as final on any of the divers thresholds—no matter how crucial these thresholds are in the successive leaps of evolution—that was not first of all obscurely primordial." Hence, we are in the presence here of a "cosmogensis" whose "tendrils insist on reaching up and being prolonged in us. . . . Evolution is on its way into the realm of the psyche. . . . Thus, thought has part with evolution." Making his own the formula used by Julian Huxley, Fr. Teilhard dares to declare that "man discovers he is nothing other than evolution become self-conscious."

With respect to the convergence of humanity, this phenomenon appears as "a subtle shifting of the onward flow of evolution." Humanity, in its first movements of expansion over the earth, tended to branch off; now, however, it converges toward a point that

constitutes the "superior pole" of all evolution—what Fr. Teilhard proposes that we call *Omega*. This final stage of evolution is of an "ultrapersonal" nature; at this point persons come together in unity and self-realization. (We have here a conception that is completely opposed to the totalitarianism of the Marxist when he discusses the "end" of humanity, a destiny wherein we discover in only a very feeble degree anything like care for the individual human person and his dignity.)

In order to clarify and give an account of this "upflow" of life to achievement in *Omega*, Fr. Teilhard appeals to two pairs of notions: that of "complexity-consciousness" and that of tangential and radial energies.

Growth in the complexity of beings is accompanied—explicitly, at least, in the realm of animal life—by progress in psychic development. This fact leads the author to lay down as a general principle the notion that consciousness and complexity are but the "two faces"—one internal, the other external—of a single phenomenon that keeps showing itself all through the course of evolution.

Hence all things in a certain sense have a kind of "inwardness"; even inert matter has this character. The degree of complexity-consciousness constitutes the fundamental parameter which allows us to measure progress in evolution and the dignity of the beings that

Gets around the fact that the universe is dynamic

evolve. Thus, man, although quite lost in the immensity of space and time, appears as the summit of the cosmos, as its final achievement and its résumé, because he is the most conscious and the most organized of beings.

From the pair of notions that we have named complexity-consciousness, we pass on to the second pair, that of tangential energy and radial energy. Thus, the dynamism which, in certain areas of the universe, tends to go along certain privileged lines of development, ever at work to assure the growing complexity of being, cannot be understood except as springing from an energy of arrangement, called radial energy. We say "radial" energy, but it is a dynamism that assures a progression of development.

This energy comes to be associated with energy in its classical sense, the energy that Fr. Teilhard calls tangential. He calls it tangential because he conceives it to be only an element of the conservation of beings, and to be unable to assure the forward march of evolutionary progress.

It would be impossible to overemphasize how opportune is this effort at synthesis outlined in *The Phenomenon of Man*. New scientific data, especially in the realm of biology, have up till now remained quite unrelated. This makes it all the more necessary to bring these data together into a coherent

and total picture. Such precisely is the task which so preoccupied Fr. Teilhard, and it is to his great credit that he was able to put himself in a frame of reference which—transcending the narrow scope of cosmologies that were completely exterior to man, and with which we have been too easily content up until now—is ample enough to permit the integration of man himself into cosmology.

NEED FOR SUCH A VIEW

Such an enterprise is by no means a mere intellectual game or some sort of fancy speculation. It answers a pressing need of our era. Today, looking beyond the partial and disjointed world-views that have thus far been offered us, we seek a global insight. We want such a view to be founded on general principles, of course, but it must also take into account all the riches of scientific findings.

Fr. Teilhard was blessed with exceptional gifts as he set out to accomplish this purpose. He had great powers of analysis, wide culture, a forceful imagination, an aptitude for synthesis and, above all, that largeness of mind which scorns the shabby and the second-rate and puts no limit to its ambition to understand.

True, some of Fr. Teilhard's descriptions and formulas have a certain poetic attraction

about them, but it must be kept in mind that for him poetry constituted a genuine method of the phenomenological study of reality. I repeat that despite its appearances of poetic form the thought of Fr. Teilhard should not be ranged alongside the thought of authors of those numerous cosmogonies that are more or less literary or philosophical in nature, but which are also careless in taking account of details of reality.

Teilhard's formulations are at times daring, but the views he expresses in *The Phenomenon of Man* have their origin in the realm of fact. These views are deeply rooted in reality. His master ideas were born and matured in the womb of a real world with which the author's long career in research made him intimately familiar. Although these ideas may evoke criticism, they cannot be lightly pushed aside; for they embody a very remarkable attempt to solve the fundamental cosmological problems which preoccupy those gifted enough to possess at once a feeling for research and a desire to master difficult problems independently of immediate results.

Moreover, despite his highly personal style, we ought not be afraid to compare the work of Fr. Teilhard with that of a Descartes or a Leibniz. Like these men, Fr. Teilhard was haunted by the desire to grasp reality in a truly profound way, and to account for and

unify the multiplicity of facts that has been brought into evidence by science.

In his case as in theirs we find profundity wedded to true mastery of thought. He knows what he wants to say; he is not satisfied with words nor content with pseudo-explanations. What he affirms in his book is not the result of some totally conceptual deduction, but is intimately bound to an "experience" in reference to which he understands how to give an account of the real and intimate structure of things.

SCIENCE OR PHILOSOPHY?

We are led quite naturally to ask whether views that are so ample and so rich really belong in any properly exclusive sense to the field of science. As he expresses them, are they not already filled with philosophy, and even with ideological considerations?

It is not easy to answer this question. Like all great creative minds, Teilhard was not slowed down by methodological discussions of any kind. Such exercises in the minutiae of scholarship seem never to have greatly interested him. Nevertheless, he was anxious to emphasize that his research was based exclusively on real phenomena, and that it was not dealing with either the principles of metaphysics or the data of revelation.

Metaphysics and revelation certainly had

a part to play in his thinking, but the views that we find expressed in *The Phenomenon of Man* are developed above all on the basis of the reality of phenomena that we can observe and understand with the help of the scientific method. In all truth, Fr. Teilhard could say



that "insofar as man can distinguish in himself different levels of knowledge, it is not the believer, but rather the naturalist, who speaks in this book and asks to be understood."

Be that as it may, the views in *The Phenomenon of Man* do not seem to be of the same type that one is accustomed to encounter in properly scientific treatises. Moreover, even if Fr. Teilhard should seem to us to have turned aside from science, this is not because he poses daring hypotheses for our consideration — every great scholar and savant does the same — but rather because his hypotheses introduce notions and considerations which lack

that mark of objectivity and precision to which science is commonly accustomed. The "inwardness" of things, the radial energy of arrangement — concepts which for Teilhard are fundamental themes — are not truly scientific notions at all.

Must we therefore brush them aside as though they had no value? Not at all. Bear in mind that in the realm of physics the distinction between science and philosophy can be made without too much difficulty, but that it is not so easy to make the same distinction in the field of biology, in spite of the progress that has been made in methodology. Particular difficulties arise in the study of evolution, the field to which the aforesaid concepts have reference.

It is by no means proven that one can neatly distinguish the "scientific" and the "philosophical" in a study that sets out to understand life itself. If we attempt to imprison ourselves in too rigid or too scholarly a separation of these two orders of knowledge, we run the risk of impoverishing and stunting our investigation. Numerous treatises written in this narrow and rigid spirit give proof that such impoverishment is not only possible but real.

Some will object that Fr. Teilhard, by transcending positive science, is really engaged in philosophy. If so, then he should

have concerned himself to a greater extent with principles and notions that have been tested.

There can be no quarrel with this. But it must also be remembered that precisely here, in the field of cosmology, our classical views and concepts, valid as they may be fundamentally, today demand reappraisal. A work like that of Fr. Teilhard can be of great help in this regard. At first blush, of course, notions such as the "inwardness" of things and radial energy appear to be somewhat baffling, but he who reflects even a bit seriously on the world as made known to us by contemporary science will find them illuminating.

The author of the work in question was a philosopher in action rather than a professional philosopher. There can be no disputing the fact that Fr. Teilhard lacks the technical sureness of touch of a trained metaphysician. Yet his cosmological analyses are not for that reason of diminished importance. We may dare to criticize them or revamp them, but if we are really anxious to enlarge the scope of cosmology in order to integrate into it all recent scientific knowledge, we must take his views into consideration. It is impossible to imagine how anyone could continue to teach cosmology without making generous allowance for the views of the author of *The Phenomenon of Man*.

CRITICISM OF TEILHARD

Thus, we see that the perspective or frame of reference in which the work of Fr. Teilhard is situated can be completely justified. Moreover, we may safely concede the riches and the profundity of the synthesis he proposes. Nevertheless, his thought calls for criticism on several points.

On the plane of positive cosmology, and quite independently of any philosophical or religious views to which it might seem to lead us, Fr. Teilhard's synthesis seems at fault in giving too great a place to evolution and in presenting views as totally valid which in fact are still under discussion.

Let us consider this point with particular respect to the realm of the physical world. Up to the present, while the thesis of the general evolution of the universe has by no means been set aside, it is equally true that it has not met unanimous acceptance in competent scientific circles. This general theory has as its most precise formulation the theory of the expanding universe. But today there are some who would oppose to the theory of the expanding universe a quite different theory — a theory of a pulsating universe, or a theory of irregular evolution; these, like the theory to which they are opposed, also rest on plausible foundations.

Nevertheless, so far as the formation of the

elements is concerned, the idea of the evolution of matter upward from an undifferentiated state toward more and more highly structured stages, which are represented by chemical elements of increasing weights, seems probable enough.

Again, the tight link that is asserted by Fr. Teilhard to exist between the world of pre-life and that of life in the general movement of evolution is not so solidly established as he affirms it to be. The "juncture" between the physical world and the world of life remains a problem which Fr. Teilhard has clarified less satisfactorily than he seems to think.

Moreover, when he touches questions on the development of civilization, Teilhard appears to rely on a little too exclusively on evolution. Evolution may be quite an essential aspect of human history, but it is difficult to go along with the seeming evaluation of Fr. Teilhard that evolution is the *only* principle by which to explain the dynamism of civilization.

To insist too much on this one principle is to seem to fail to recognize realms like the history of art or the history of philosophy, which are likewise very important. Evolution, with its principle of linear growth, is not able fully to account for them. Moreover, in these fields we come upon patterns of evolu-

tion of a quite different type — cycles, regressions, etc.

NOT A TOTAL TRUTH

When we regard it from the point of view of philosophy and religion, *The Phenomenon of Man* is again found to be less than completely satisfying. Let us be very clear on this point. For the reasons outlined above, we ought not see in *The Phenomenon of Man* a metaphysical or theological work, and hence should not attempt to judge it as such. As is obvious, Fr. Teilhard has propounded certain views of man and his destiny which have a bearing on philosophical and religious problems. In fact, in a final chapter of his book, he has a treatise on the "Christian phenomenon." But here again he is dealing with considerations of *fact* and not with properly *doctrinal* affirmations.

In a word, Fr. Teilhard has in no way attempted in *The Phenomenon of Man* to give us the *total truth* regarding man. Such truth must also derive from metaphysics and, especially, revelation. Teilhard said this explicitly in his preface: "Let no one seek here a final explanation of things, a metaphysics." And again: "The book that I have written should not be read as one might read a work of metaphysics, and much less as one might peruse some sort of theological essay."

However, despite the care that the author took to write only within the framework of the phenomenal order, and to restrict what he has to say to that order, Fr. Teilhard — precisely because of his remarkable ability at synthesis — has presented us with a set of views on man and the world which to some little degree gives the impression of being *self-sufficient*. This, of course, is a problem that he himself recognized, for he said: "It is impossible to attempt a general interpretation of the universe without seeming to explain it from top to bottom."

The reader must not fail to note this problem about the work in question. One might wish that Teilhard's synthesis were more open, more unfinished. If it had been, the book would then be more useful in the work of building up a complete vision of man and the universe. This vision would have been one which, since it summoned up other sources than mere scientific experience, would have found a place for the very mystery of our freedom — for that mystery of evil which is not simply the mystery of the evil that we undergo (a problem which cosmology can discuss), but also of that evil which is the product of our wills. This sort of evil is not very directly treated in *The Phenomenon of Man*, even though Fr. Teilhard was at pains to note that the fortunate evolution of the

world that he envisaged depended on the free decision of man.

HIS CHURCH'S TEACHINGS

One should not try — as certain of Fr. Teilhard's critics do — to find things in *The Phenomenon of Man* that are contrary to the faith. Even where Fr. Teilhard's views leap beyond the realm of strict positive evidence, they always allow complete scope for the teaching of the Church. It is impossible for us, to examine this point in detail. Let us look at several essential observations.

The immanence and the spontaneity of evolution by no means rule out the transcendence of God. After all, evolution is only the phenomenal aspect of divine creation. Moreover, God's transcendence is demanded by the very exigencies of human action, which, with its ethical striving for immortality, must constantly refer itself to a God who transcends the world. We have here one of the fundamental points of the thinking of Fr. Teilhard, and one that in his other writings he calls the dialectical meaning of his thought.

Still other critics have felt obliged to note that in *The Phenomenon of Man* an excessive primacy is given to continuity in the development of beings. But this is to fail to recognize in Fr. Teilhard the notion of transformation,

where continuity and discontinuity are indissolubly complementary to one another.

Such critics also fail to recognize that the particular intervention of God, who creates the human soul, cannot be fully expressed on the phenomenal level, where we can find nothing more than a reflection of the mystery of creation.

TEILHARD'S SYNTHESIS

Furthermore, so far as the mystery of original sin is concerned, is there any need to add that we would be guilty of a grave error of methodology if we reproached Fr. Teilhard for not having given this mystery an organic place in the cosmological synthesis he was making? In fact, it cannot be recognized in experience, because original sin is something which, in the last analysis, we know through revelation.

When examined attentively, the synthesis of Fr. Teilhard is seen to be less complete and less satisfactory than it might appear at first glance. Moreover, it is proper to read a book like this with a mind forewarned in regard to certain points of interpretation. But be all this as it may, Fr. Teilhard's synthesis is none the less a major contribution to our thinking about the world.

Moreover, we must remember that for a world fascinated by the progress of science, a

synthesis like that of Fr. Teilhard opens great windows to faith, and this in an age when such approaches are more than ever indispensable. One other notable achievement of this synthesis is that today, when the Marxists are attempting to monopolize the field of science, Fr. Teilhard demonstrates that science cannot find its fulfillment except in a spiritual dimension.

Let us therefore take up this book with the same simplicity of heart that caused its author to write: "I might well have deceived myself on a number of points. Let others, then, try to do better. All that I wanted to accomplish was to make people feel the difficulty and the urgency of the problem, to comprehend its immense magnitude, and to perceive the form in which a solution must inevitably be found."

The Importance of Matter

By Robert J. Roth, S. J.

Not long ago the *Saturday Evening Post* published an article on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin entitled: "The Priest Who Haunts the World" (10/12/63). It gave dramatic recognition to the French Jesuit's influence in the United States — though for a half dozen years Americans have become increasingly aware of him through wide sales of English translations of his books *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*. Symptomatic of this trend was the lead Fordham University took among American colleges and universities in sponsoring a series of six lectures on Père Teilhard by a Belgian Jesuit, Fr. Maurits Huybens, S.J., European editor of *International Philosophical Quarterly*. Originally scheduled for a limited audience in a small seminar room, the sessions had to be moved to a large lecture hall jammed with some 500 students and professors from Fordham and neighboring colleges.

What is it in the thought of Père Teilhard that is catching the imagination of Americans? Undoubtedly each one, from his own reading, will answer this question from a

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slightly different point of view. But perhaps what most of all has called forth a response in the hearts of the people of America and of the world is his confidence in the value of man's involvement with matter. His position is that of an evolutionist who accepts the origin and development of living things from elemental matter.

Now that evolution has reached its culmination in man, he holds, future progress will be made principally in the direction of man's growth as a person. Such growth, though moving along moral and religious lines, will depend on man's continued interaction with the world, which includes inorganic matter, social institutions, cultural development and — very importantly in our age — science. It is by active engagement in all these that man can achieve his fulfillment on the natural and supernatural levels.

This message has given hope and encouragement to all who had begun to feel overwhelmed by the imperious demands that worldly concerns make upon their time and energies. Men have suddenly become aware that interest in this world can have meaning for their enrichment as humans. Matter, then, becomes important — one might even say, sacred. "By virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, *nothing* here below is *profane* for those who know how to see."

This growing enthusiasm for Père Teilhard, with his stress on the importance of matter, will not be surprising to those who have accepted without question the "old tag of American materialism," as Jacques Maritain called it in his *Reflections on America*. Even we Americans become embarrassed and apologetic when it is mentioned. Prof. Maritain, however, who knows us well from having lived among us as teacher and friend for many years, has called this label a "curtain of silly gossip and slander."

Respect for matter, not as sense gratification but as a means of human growth on its highest levels, has been basic to the American experience. The conviction has deepened that the world of matter, of people, of events, of cultural and scientific progress, is important and that, indeed, human growth depends very much on active involvement in all these things. Hence, in spite of the novel form in which Père Teilhard's message is expressed, combining as it does a basic scientific theory of evolution with philosophical and theological vision, this message should not be entirely new to those who know our history.

Critics of American materialism, of course, would see the development of American experience as a movement from a deeply religious to a thoroughgoing naturalistic spirit.

And yet, is the latter primarily a negation of religion? Is it not rather an affirmation of matter—along with a conviction that, in affirming it, one cannot at the same time say yes to religion? Attention to certain aspects of our history may serve to suggest an answer to these questions.

The origins of America had strong roots in theology, though it was Protestant rather than Catholic theology that was most influential. It is easy to exaggerate, but one must admit that there were strong religious convictions animating the first Pilgrims who came to America. They were imbued with a biblical sense of the sacredness of history and with a belief in divine intervention in human events. Yet, though the City of God was their absorbing interest, they could not long ignore the City of Man. They had to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the world of matter as they struggled to build homes and provide for the necessities of life.

TRANSCENDENTALISM

As America grew, there grew also a tension between man's orientation to God and his commitment to the world. New England Transcendentalism prior to the Civil War had been characterized as a reaction against a rising naturalistic outlook, and especially against what was felt by many to be a growing ab-

sorption in material concerns — a by-product of the industrial and economic growth of the early 19th century. Witness the flight from the world of a Henry Thoreau at Walden Pond and of the small Utopian bands at Brook Farm and Fruitlands. These aspects of Transcendentalism would seem to characterize it as the alienation of man from the world.

But the movement cannot be understood unless it is also seen as a reaction against Calvinist-influenced theologies, with their separations between God, nature and man, and as an affirmation that man's contact with God and nature formed a single experience. Dominant in this movement is the figure of Emerson, who, in opposition to a crass materialistic view of the universe, voiced the conviction that religious, ethical, and esthetic experience could be found only by healing the breach between the human spirit and nature.

Within this movement, too, one finds a dissatisfaction with existing (i.e., Unitarian) theological formulations, a shedding of theological categories, an individualistic tendency to stand off and criticize religious rite and doctrine, and an attempt to explain divine revelation in natural terms. This tendency is found, in one degree or other, in the leading figures of Transcendentalism, such as Emerson, Thoreau and Theodore Parker. Perhaps here, more than at any other point, is focused

the rising tension between theology and matter.

LATER ISMS

The next development in this country's thinking was American idealism, our leading philosophic movement in the latter part of the 19th century. It was a movement criticized in its own day for trying to make philosophy a substitute for theology. If we grant that this is what it actually did, idealism can be seen as a transitional stage between Transcendentalism and the pragmatic and naturalistic philosophies before which it was to give way. And yet it is more than transitional, for in its respect for matter it is continuous with what preceded and followed it. Idealists like Josiah Royce saw man's task as an active engagement in the world, and human knowledge as the means of civilizing the earth for the betterment of mankind.

It is especially in pragmatism, America's first "indigenous" philosophy, and in naturalism, sometimes incorrectly called its logical outcome, that we witness the decline of the traditional religious sense and the thoroughgoing acceptance of matter. The men engaged in these movements resolved the tension between religion and the world of matter by gradually eliminating religion, since in their view it no longer made the world intelligible.

On the other hand, it is now clear that American philosophic thought in this period was primarily a conscious expression of what the American spirit had always exemplified, namely, a conviction that matter is essential for human self-development.

Pragmatists and naturalists have nurtured what John Dewey called a "respect for matter" because they were sure that it was only by dealing with matter that man could release his potential, fulfill his drive for achievement, and further the progress of humanity on its highest level. From this point of view, nothing that man encounters in his environment is unimportant for human growth. Matter and energy, social, political and economic institutions, science and technology—all must engage man's attention and interest so as to help him achieve his maximum development. To the pragmatist and naturalist, flight from active engagement in the world is a betrayal of one's fundamental responsibility.

AMERICAN PROPHETS

In the light of all this, it is not surprising that so many have received Père Teilhard with enthusiasm. His appeal, especially to Catholics, consists in the feeling that he has gone a long way toward providing answers in terms of their own religious experience. There are strong indications that he will be-

come a prophet in America; and this is a great gain, for we have much to learn from him.

It is a pity, however, that we have not listened to our own American prophets. The importance of matter has already been called to our attention many times. It has been stressed by speakers of varied religious backgrounds and, more lately, by those with no religious affiliations at all. What they have proclaimed, basically, has been man's need for involvement in matter if he is to reach a fulfillment that is truly human and ennobling. They have called for a reassessment of the possibilities of matter, for a reaffirmation of the world as sacred and as demanding our respect because it holds the key to the development of man's highest ideals.

We Americans may and should regret that in our more recent history our prophets have tried to exclude God from their vision of human fulfillment (though these men, in turn, would indict theism for failing to make the world meaningful). But we need not be ashamed of such prophets. Materialists they have been, indeed, but their materialism has been one that has seen matter as a means of human enrichment. True, we have had our share of crass materialism, too, but more often than not this has been due to our material advantages. One is justified in asking whether other peoples, of other cultural backgrounds,

would have had the spiritual resources to resist any more successfully than ourselves the degrading effects of an "affluent society."

From one point of view, the thought of a man like Père Teilhard is more congenial to the American temperament than to that of any other people. We do not need to have the importance of matter proved to us. This orientation has been native to us from our beginnings. On the other hand, there are certain elements of Père Teilhard's thought that will evoke strong reservations on the part of Americans.

POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

One such element is his position that evolution has a direction—a position he admits is undemonstrable by science, even though his standpoint is that of a scientist. G. Gaylord Simpson, in an otherwise sympathetic critique, has called attention to the inconsistency of this position, and it is bound to receive further criticism. Another such element is what Julian Huxley called his "gallant attempt to reconcile the supernatural elements in Christianity with the facts and implications of evolution." Mr. Huxley indicates that this is unacceptable to many scientists, though he acknowledges the "positive value of his naturalistic general approach."

Moreover, the world of matter that the

American faces includes not merely science, but science as it is applied to a highly industrialized and technological society. There are those who are appalled by the overwhelming possibilities of human depersonalization implicit in such a society, and their wish would be to prevent or at least limit the growth of technology. For America, this is an impossible solution; our society is destined to become even more technological. A future respect for matter must face explicitly, and in detail, the many problems for human fulfillment presented by such a society.

There is also the fact that we live in a democracy—though one would be hard put to it to state clearly what the specific nature of that democracy is. In this context, human development will follow lines quite different from those of a highly individualistic or an authoritarian society. There is need in America of a carefully delineated theory of the individual, the community and their mutual interaction, and need of an application of this theory to a democratic way of life.

One could go on to indicate similar problems that arise in other areas, such as social order, economics, and education. But enough has been mentioned to indicate the extent of the difficulty.

Hence some interesting questions remain. Has Père Teilhard raised a problem and sug-

gested an answer precisely in *our* terms? Is it possible literally to transplant a set of ideas from a foreign soil so that they may grow and flourish as truly our own? This latter question deserves serious consideration and should not be too hurriedly discarded. On the other hand, to shirk responsibility by letting others do our thinking for us may be too easy a solution. If that be so, we must then ask whether America has sufficiently shed its intellectual "colonialism" to work out once more an "indigenous" philosophy, and a theology too, which, though stimulated and enriched by the thought of peoples of other times and places, will meet the problems that are somehow uniquely ours.

Whatever the answer, the future thought of America must move in terms of greater, not less, respect for matter — with corrections dictated by man's need for God and religion. I am convinced that we Americans can make this synthesis in a way that will be meaningful to us, and when we do, we may well have a prophecy and a message of our own to proclaim openly to the world.

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